Ontario Ministry of Labour
Handicapped Employment Program

Partners for Employment

New Challenges for Rehabilitation Professionals

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Partners for Employment

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New Challenges

The issues and concerns of today's rehabilitation specialists are very different from what they were ten or even five years ago. Now, a climate of greater receptivity toward the employment of people with disabilities has developed. This increasing acceptance can be seen in the growing recognition among job-seekers, rehabilitation professionals, governments and employers, that people with disabilities can be, and have a right to be, productive members of the workforce.

In direct response, the role of the rehabilitation network is changing and the need for up-to-date information is increasing. It is the aim of this publication to highlight some new developments in the area of employment and disability of particular interest to rehabilitation professionals. It is also meant to foster a full sense of partnership between vocational specialists and those looking for work through the various stages of job-search leading to competitive employment. It is hoped that the thoughts that follow will add to the exchange of ideas and the pursuit of new challenges.

Employment Equity

> "The achievement of equality in employment depends on a double-edged approach. The first concerns those pre-employment conditions that affect employment. The second concerns those conditions in the workplace that militate against equal participation in employment." *

Employment equity focuses on removing barriers in recruitment, hiring, training and promotion processes. It is creating a new climate in the labour market that will lead to an increase in employment opportunities for persons with disabilities.

Pre-employment conditions are the more immediate concern of rehabilitation counsellors. Some of these are addressed in this document. However, this does not preclude the rehabilitation community, and others involved in employment equity, from gaining an understanding of the overall environment in which employment equity operates.

In the last decade, many factors have been involved in increasing the access of persons with disabilities to meaningful employment. While employment equity is emerging as one of the most significant elements, other factors related to this new thrust include:

- a determined effort on the part of disabled people and their organizations to affect public policy about their right to work
- a response from the three levels of government which indicates a dramatic shift in emphasis from providing care for disabled people to ensuring that they have reasonable options for equitable employment available to them

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* Abella R., Equality in Employment: A Royal Commission Report

Various levels of government, as well as the broader public sector, are committed to employment equity (or variations such as affirmative action and equal opportunity) for their own workforces and represent a valuable source of jobs for people with disabilities.

Beyond this, employment equity is supported by several pieces of legislation. For example, the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, the Canadian Human Rights Act and the Ontario Human Rights Code define employment as a basic right and each allows for the implementation of employment equity programs on behalf of any group which is disadvantaged in the workforce. *

In addition, the federal government has legislated the establishment of employment equity programs. The Employment Equity Act affects federal Crown Corporations and federally regulated private sector companies with 100 or more employees. As well, federal government suppliers with 100 or more employees are required to commit themselves to employment equity under the new Federal Contractors Program. They must do this to maintain their eligibility when bidding for contracts for goods and services of $200,000 or more.

Finally, changes to human rights legislation in Canada mean that instead of requiring members of disadvantaged groups to accommodate themselves to restrictive employment practices, employers are now expected to reasonably accommodate their special needs. Some recent Canadian and Ontario Human Rights decisions have also expanded the concept of "reasonable accommodation".

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* Disadvantaged groups include people with disabilities, women and ethnocultural minorities; also called target groups.

A positive outcome is that private sector companies, whether or not they are directly affected by these changes, are becoming more pro-active on behalf of target groups.

There are a number of compelling reasons for rehabilitation professionals to become fully informed about employment equity:

- More employers are willing to hire people with disabilities into a broader range of occupations.
- Employers require information about making the workplace accessible and about the full range of technical aids and job accommodations that expand the range of jobs disabled workers can perform.
- Job-seekers with disabilities require information about what employment equity means and how it can be made to work for them.
- Some labour unions are negotiating for affirmative action or employment equity programs through the collective bargaining process.

Another important aspect of employment equity is that these programs are designed to eliminate the specific barriers that target groups face in the workforce. In the case of people with disabilities, these include:

- physical barriers (lack of access to work sites and absence of adaptive devices)
- attitudinal barriers (the view held by some that people with disabilities are not employable, employable only in a narrow range of occupations or not promotable)
- systemic barriers (those employment policies and administrative procedures of an organization which often have an inadvertently negative effect on the equitable recruitment, selection, and promotion of target groups)

It is certain that, in the years ahead, corporate employment equity programs will be more widely implemented. Therefore, it is important that rehabilitation professionals and disabled job seekers gain a clear understanding of employment equity in order to take advantage of opportunities that will arise from these new initiatives.

The Job Seeker

> "We need to examine the present work context. We must honestly address the role our facilities have played in teaching and perpetuating dependency and passivity. If we use our organizational skills to empower people rather than vesting power in organizations we may feel less secure, but be more successful." *

There is a new direction emerging in rehabilitation which focuses on giving job seekers with disabilities the opportunity to find their own jobs instead of rehabilitation counsellors finding jobs for their "clients". Job seekers will, of course, be at various stages of job readiness. Some will be job ready and require only minimal support in order to search out and obtain a job on their own, while others will require a great deal of assistance and support throughout the job preparation and job search process.

The information presented in this section will address the range of support that job seekers may require.

Peer Support - A fundamental resource that should be made available is peer support. Having the opportunity to talk to other people who have gone through, or are presently going through, the job search process enables a person to increase their self-confidence about conducting their own job search. Counsellors can assist job seekers in making contact with their peers by informing them of the

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* Marlett, N.I., Gall, R., Wight-Felske, (Ed.) Dialogue on Disability: A Canadian Perspective Volume I The Service System, University of Calgary 1984 Employment Options by N.I. Marlett and H.I. Day Pg. 106

various self-help groups or independent living centres in their communities that offer peer support.

Identifying the Right Job - Before anyone can begin the process of looking for a job, they must know what kind they are capable of doing and want to do. The counsellor should discuss with job seekers such things as:

- their skills and abilities
- their interests
- where they want to work
- what supports they may require to enable them to perform a job
- the job market (Is there a demand for the type of work they are trained to do or are interested in?)

If both individual and counsellor decide that the job seeker is not yet job ready then an assessment may be a useful tool. The various choices that are available and the benefits they offer should be mutually discussed.

Accepting the Responsibility of Financial Independence - The financial implications of starting to work are of critical importance for many people. For example, if they have a pension, they need to explore how they feel about losing it once they are employed. Is the person prepared to assume responsibility for earning their own income. Or do they feel that they will be unable to earn enough money to cover both the monetary and non-monetary benefits that a pension provides. (Non-monetary benefits are such things as free health coverage, subsidized housing and transportation.) If they are unsure about taking the risk, the counsellor can assist individuals by discussing with them the option of having a trial discontinuation of

their pension through the Ministry of Community and Social Services Work Incentive Program (WIN).

The Job Search - The job seeker and the counsellor can discuss the degree of independence that the job seeker wishes to have in the job search process. If job seekers are quite confident in their abilities to find their own job opportunities, they may only need minimal support throughout their job search. In this situation, it would be helpful to discuss with the person the helpful hints outlined in "Taking Aim - Job Search Strategies for People with Disabilities" published by the Handicapped Employment Program.

However, many job seekers may not yet have the ability and confidence to conduct their own job search. It will then be necessary for the vocational specialist to make the initial contact with employers. In these situations, the counsellor and the job seeker should jointly determine what information is going to be shared with employers.

Preparing For the Interview - The interview is perhaps the most difficult part of the job search process. It is at this point that the person must try and prove to the employer that they are the most suitable candidate for the job. To have a good chance of convincing the employer of their abilities they must do a lot of preparation. Here the counsellors can play a helpful role.

What follows is a list of information that a job seeker should be aware of before they go to an interview:

Knowledge of the job:

- the job title, and its requirements
- skills
- education
- experience

The organization:

- What are its products or services?
- Who are its customers?

Encourage the job seeker to research the organization on their own by contacting its public relations department or the public library.

Practice Interviews - Role playing is an excellent way to prepare someone for an interview. The counsellor can take the role of the interviewer and ask the person questions similar to those that they will likely be asked in the real interview. At the end of the exercise, the interviewing strengths and weaknesses of the individuals, as well as ways of overcoming these weaknesses, should be discussed.

This is also an appropriate time to discuss how the job seeker should handle the subject of his/her disability in the interview. They should consider whether they want to take the initiative by raising the subject at the outset of the interview by pointing out that the disability will not affect their ability to do the job, and that they may (or may not) need job modifications or technical aids to enable them to perform the job successfully. If the person wishes to wait to discuss their disability until the employer raises the question in the interview, then the counsellor should remind the candidate that an employer is only allowed to ask job-related questions about an applicant's disability.

Finally, employer expectations of job readiness should be discussed. It is important that information shared with job seekers be based on labour market realities. Therefore, counsellors should approach employers and their organizations to obtain feedback on what constitutes job readiness from their perspective.

The Responsiblity of the Candidate in the Interview - Too often, candidates feel that their fate in an interview is entirely in the hands of the employer. As a result, the only thing they feel they can do is try and convince the employer that they have the necessary skills to do the job. In reality, much of the responsibility as to whether someone is successful, is in the hands of the candidate.

Vocational specialists should make sure that applicants understand this before they go to an interview. They should be encouraged to take a self-marketing approach. It is also important that job seekers realize that an interview is not a work situation, but rather a communications situation. Therefore, the manner in which they present themselves is as important as the skills they possess.

After the Interview - The counsellor and the job seeker should meet after the interview to discuss how successful the experience was. The following questions which are listed in "Taking Aim" may be used to guide the discussion:

1. What questions did the interviewer ask that I was not prepared for?
2. What questions did I forget to ask about the position and the company?
3. What is one reason that I might not get hired for the job?
4. What was the strongest part of my presentation?

5. Did I describe my accomplishments clearly and confidently? If not, where and why were there difficulties?
6. Was the interviewer convinced that my disability is irrelevant or could be accommodated in the position?
7. What impression did the interviewer have of me at the end of our meeting? Is this the impression I wanted to give?
8. How could I have improved the interview?

The Employment Decision - Once the person has successfully obtained employment and congratulations have been offered, then the counsellor should let the person and the employer know that they will be available at any time should either require support in dealing with work-related problems.

If the job seeker has not been successful in obtaining a job after numerous interviews, the counsellor can assist by turning some of the perceived negatives into a positive learning experience. It is also important that the job seeker understand that being turned down for a position is not a reflection of their self-worth.

The Employer

A vital link in the process of securing access to employment opportunities is the employer who is willing to recruit persons with disabilities and place them in meaningful jobs. Personal contact is essential to persuade employers to consider people with disabilities as a valuable resource. This contact should initially be made with the senior management of an organization to gain their commitment.

Large employers who are affected by the Employment Equity Act or the Federal Contractors Program will likely be able to provide a considerable number of employment opportunities to persons with disabilities. These organizations are federally regulated or they receive contracts from the Federal Government. In either case they have a vested interest in demonstrating good faith and complying with the regulations. Private sector companies that are not affected by the new legislation are still sensitive to its requirements and to the likelihood that provincial governments may institute similar provisions.

Some employers may only be responsive to existing or potential legislative initiatives so that further government intervention can be avoided. Other employers are beginning to view as legitimate the workforce needs of the various target groups. Still other employers are motivated to take positive steps because they value the role of contributing to the quality of life in their communities. These examples of "enlightened self-interest" can be of benefit to people with disabilities who are ready to enter or re-enter the workforce.

Whatever their motivation, all employers have concerns about hiring disabled job seekers which must be fully and sympathetically addressed:

- Rehabilitation professionals can convince employers that productivity will not be affected, when the appropriate job-match is made.
- Employers who are concerned about turnover can be assured that people with disabilities are as retainable as any other employees.
- Employers should be informed about the potential of workers with disabilities for training, up-grading and promotion.
- It is important to determine what types of job skills and employee characteristics employers are seeking (The issue of job readiness needs to be addressed here.)
- Rehabilitation professionals can provide advice to employers on how to deal with disabled employees who have performance problems.
- Other issues of importance to employers are costs, safety, job accommodations, and the availability of government subsidies for technical aids and for improving workplace accessibility.

Many of these issues have been addressed in a number of recent Canadian and American studies. Employers can be provided with the results of this research and thus be assured that the employment of people with disabilities need be no more risky or costly and, most important, no less a positive experience than the employment of non-disabled people.

Dealing with small companies presents a different challenge for the rehabilitation professional. These companies are not affected by employment equity legislation and the decision to hire a person with a disability is usually an autonomous one made by the owner. However, small companies have traditionally been a good source of employment for people with disabilities.

Determining how best to "market" the skills and productivity of disabled job seekers and coaching them to market themselves to employers is one key to increasing the participation of people with disabilities in the workforce.

Reasonable Accommodation

A major employer concern is how to adapt a job, a site or a work environment to the needs of disabled workers. It is important that rehabilitation workers have a good understanding of the concept of reasonable accommodation as it is an essential tool to be used in the process of assisting disabled job seekers to become gainfully employed. Job seekers should be coached on how to discuss reasonable accommodation at the interview.

Examples of possible accommodations include:

- equipment and devices
- support services
- assistance related to performing the job
- job task adaptations
- job site adaptations
- flexible work schedules.

When approaching employers, rehabilitation workers should draw their attention to the following information about the job accommodation needs of disabled persons.

- Fewer than 20% of employees with disabilities require any accommodations whatsoever, a fact which is well documented in a 1982 study conducted by the U.S. Department of Labour.

- In the same study, of those employees who did require accommodations, half involved no cost at all and fewer than 10% of accommodations exceeded $2,000.
- The costs of technical aids and workplace modifications can often be paid under government incentive programs.
- Accommodations are dependent upon individual circumstances and would likely differ for each job seeker.
- It is essential to involve candidates in the decision about accommodations, since they are often the ones who know what will best serve their needs.

Labour Unions

To date, little thought has been given by the rehabilitation community to involving labour unions in the process of improving employment opportunities for persons with disabilities. Instead, labour unions have been blamed for blocking the entry of disabled people into regular employment. The belief that labour unions present a barrier to the employment of disabled persons often stems from the notion that they have control over hiring and firing. However, the "power" of labour unions is confined to the area of negotiating wage rates and working conditions.

In reality, labour unions have a natural concern for the economic and social well-being of people with disabilities. This support stems from the significant number of trade unionists who become disabled each year, either on or off the job, and extends to include family members who may be disabled in some way. Trade unionists, as members of the community, are amenable to extending their concern to include any member of society with a disability.

Labour's commitment to increasing the employment of people with disabilities was formalized at the national level in 1980, when the Executive Council of the Canadian Labour Congress adopted a policy statement with a plan of action for assisting disabled Canadians. The Ontario Federation of Labour adopted its own policy statement in 1981.

Trade unionists are human beings like everyone else. As with the rest of society, some have little understanding of the concerns and needs of disabled persons because of limited exposure. Other trade

unionists may see disabled persons as a threat to their own job security. Many of the concerns and misconceptions that trade unionists have about disabled persons can be laid to rest by improving communication between the labour movement, the disabled community, employers and the rehabilitation network.

As with anyone, trade unionists need to become aware that people with disabilities can be full participants in the workplace and community. They need to know that the reason why they are not fully integrated into the mainstream is because of attitudinal, architectural and systemic barriers that have continued to exist because of a lack of understanding on the part of society in general.

Armed with increased knowledge of the true needs and abilities of people with disabilities, trade unions can play an important role in assisting them to gain full access to the workplace. Listed below are some of the areas where labour can be of assistance:

- Union members' knowledge of the workplace can be very useful to the process of making reasonable accommodations or making the workplace accessible.
- Union members are able to make recommendations on how a job can be restructured to accommodate the special needs of a disabled individual who has the necessary skills to perform the job.
- It is in the area of collective bargaining that the labour movement can be most effective in assisting people with disabilities. Accordingly, unions should be encouraged to bargain for contract language in their collective agreements that ensures:

    - job retention and vocational rehabilitation for workers disabled on the job — whatever the cause
    - no discrimination as a result of disability

- provision of technical aids or workplace modifications to accommodate disabled workers
- greater variety of entry level positions made available to disabled workers

The rehabilitation community can benefit from communicating with the labour movement to increase their knowledge of how organized labour works. However, it is important to be realistic. Accordingly, one should keep the following in mind when approaching them.

Unions are membership organizations, and their primary responsibility is to their present members rather than to job seekers with disabilities. However, at the same time, the labour movement has a longstanding concern for social justice and equality for all members of the community which makes it only natural for them to want to increase employment opportunities for disabled persons.

In order for organized labour to become more involved with employment issues relating to persons with disabilities, the disabled community and rehabilitation professionals should make the initial contact with organized labour either through labour councils or union locals.

Future Visions

> "We must first challenge our own needs and beliefs about disabled persons... We must learn to trust disabled people and society in their ability to grow through trial and error. To accomplish this, we need to move our support into the real world." *

The above quote offers a thought-provoking stimulant for the ideas discussed in the preceding pages. This vision reflects an intent to not only increase the employment and integration of people with disabilities, but to assist in the achievement of that goal in the complete sense of equality that the word "partnership" implies.

As well as meeting the needs of job seekers, rehabilitation specialists should also be aware of the demands of tomorrow's labour market. New business areas are developing with increasing frequency. Therefore, counsellors must be flexible in assessing potential job opportunities. An ability, on the part of the professional, to project into the future and to look at fresh areas of business growth, can be a major asset to job seekers.

In order to help people with disabilities to translate their needs into constructive action, rehabilitation specialists must continue to open communication channels, initiate and maintain relationships and encourage self-exploration. Among many major skills, good counselling depends on the ability to listen to the expectations and

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* Marlett N.L., Gall, R., Wight-Felske (Ed.) Dialogue on Disability: A Canadian Perspective, Volume I The University of Calgary 1984 Employment Options by N.L. Marlett and H.L. Day Pg. 106

goals of the job seeker and to offer helpful information to aid them in making their own decisions. Through such mutual interaction, both counsellor and client will truly become "Partners for Employment".

Resources

The following publications, of interest to health professionals, are available from the Handicapped Employment Program.

Focus on Employment: Resources for Professionals Working with People with Disabilities (Metro Toronto)

Taking Aim: Job Search Strategies for People with Disabilities (French and English; also on audiotape)

ORDER NUMBER

12	HEP Resources for Health Professionals (brochure)
14	HEP program (brochure which describes overall program)
301	Physical Demands Analysis of Jobs
302	Physical Demands Analysis Checklist
306	Job Matching: The Assessment of Individuals for Work (Prepared for the Handicapped Employment Program of the Ontario Ministry of Labour by Abt Associates of Canada)
312	Employment Aids for Persons with Visual Disabilities
1402	Job Seeker Kit (French and English)
1404	Health Professional Kit
1405	Barrier Free Design Kit
1406	Co-worker Awareness Kit

Many other publications and articles are available. For a complete listing ask for the Program Resource List. For any of the above publications write, citing the order number, to:

Resource Centre
Handicapped Employment Program
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